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ABSTRACT

In April 1989, a group of 30 educators from across New York State met for 3 days' intense discussion of impediments to shared decision making in schools. The seminar format modeled the communication and group dynamics considered an essential part of the shared decision-making process. The facilitator's role quickly changed from directive to supportive and the group assumed governance of discussions and presentations. Relying upon the expertise of seminar members and arranging the facilities and time to allow for both reflection and discussion are hallmarks of the approach. Major impediments to the shared decision-making process include individual and institutional fear of change and role divisions. The changes needed and the process itself are examined on an individual basis as well as on an institutional basis. A recurrent theme throughout the discussions dealt with the issue of developing a sense of trust between and among educators. The appendix includes an article entitled "LEAD Center's Select Seminar Participants Consider Ways to Implement Shared Decision Making." (SI)

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New York LEADCENTER
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A View from the Inside: ADDRESSING THE IMPEDIMENTS TO SHARED DECISION MAKING

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Report of the Select Seminar on Addressing the Impediments to Shared Decision Making

New York State
LEAD Center

Leadership in Educational Administration Development Center
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School of Education, The University at Albany
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Copies of this Report are available ($10.00 per copy—including postage) from the CASDA-LEAD Center, Husted 211, University at Albany, School of Education, State University of New York, 135 Western Avenue, Albany, New York 12222.

A View from the Inside: ADDRESSING THE IMPEDIMENTS TO SHARED DECISION MAKING

December, 1989

Report of the Select Seminar on Addressing the Impediments to Shared Decision Making

Funding for this publication and the seminar was provided by the New York State Leadership in Educational Administration Development (LEAD) Center and by a New York State Education Department "Transferring Success" Grant

A View From the Inside: ADDRESSING THE IMPEDIMENTS TO SHARED DECISION MAKING

Sponsored by:
Leadership in Educational Administration Development Center
at the Capital Area School Development Association
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A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE:
Report of the Select Seminar on Addressing the Impediments to Shared Decision Making

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The first, essential step is to establish an atmosphere of trust among the participants: teachers, parents, administrators, members of the Board of Education.

Foreword

In April 1989, a group of educators from across New York State met at the Rensselaerville Institute for three days' intense discussion of shared decision-making in schools. The Center for Leadership in Educational Administration Development (LEAD) brought them together for this purpose, with the support of a grant under the State's "Transferring Success" program. This report is one result of that seminar.

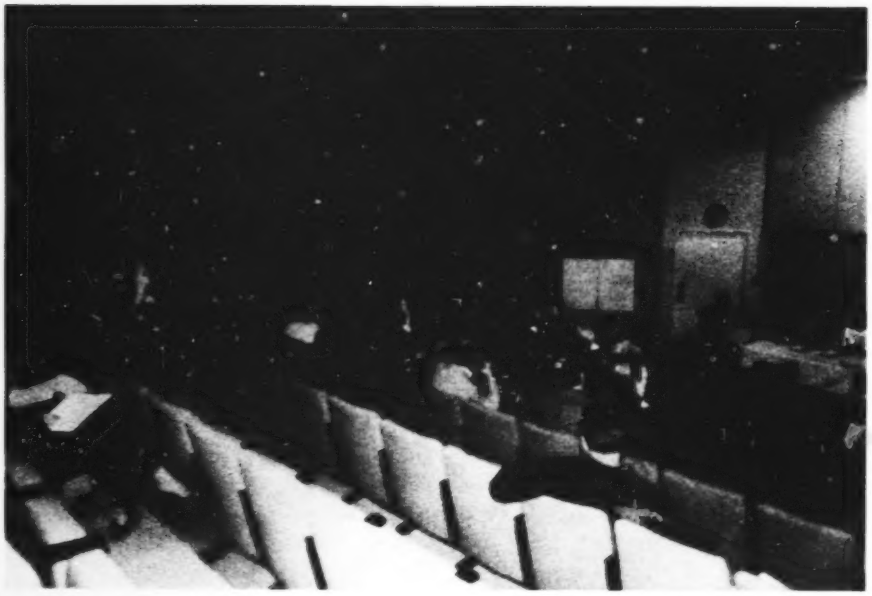
The report is full of practical advice from people who have worked to bring their own schools closer to shared decision-making. As the title indicates, the report recognizes the difficulties inherent in the undertaking. The first, essential step is to establish an atmosphere of trust among the participants: teachers, parents, administrators, members of the Board of Education. The report recommends that schools begin by generating a shared vision through a mission statement, defining terms clearly and involving all the members of the educational community.

Again and again, seminar members focused on the attitudes that underlie success in what is, for most school communities, a new endeavor—and, at first, a risky and even painful one. "Let us see each other," said one, "as professionals having skills and knowledge needed to benefit children, rather than as members of role groups and bargaining units." Participants should view themselves as "adult learners," with the openness and willingness to risk that are essential to the task.

Despite its realistic assessment of the difficulties, the report is encouraging. With determination, cooperation, and careful groundwork, schools can implement shared decision-making. The Board of Regents and the State Education Department have endorsed shared decision-making in their proposal to make teaching a licensed profession in New York State and in their Excellence and Accountability Program. Our goal is that of the LEAD seminar participants: to benefit children. *A View From the Inside* will be helpful to any school community seeking to make this fundamental change.

Thomas Sobol
Commissioner of Education and
President of the University of
The State of New York

Dr. Sobol was appointed Commissioner of Education and President of the University of the State of New York on July 1, 1987. Before joining the Education Department, he served as Superintendent of Schools in Scarsdale for 16 years and in a variety of other posts in school districts in New York and Massachusetts. Dr. Sobol has been a teacher and an administrator at the secondary and university levels. He is the co-author of *Your Child in School* published in 1987 as the first in a series of books intended to help parents understand and become involved in their children's education. Dr. Sobol received his B.A. and M.A. degrees from Harvard and his doctorate from Teacher's College, Columbia.



Preface

This report on *Addressing the Impediments to Shared Decision Making* is the fourth in a series of white papers produced by the New York State Leadership in Educational Administration Program located at the Capital Area School Development Association. This particular part of the CASDA-LEAD Center series entitled *A View From the Inside*, was supported by a Transferring Success Grant from the State Education Department. Special thanks go to Bruce Crowder, Thomas Fitzgerald, and Richard Weiner for their assistance during the grant writing process.

This Select Seminar report reflects the collective wisdom of some 30 administrators, teachers, board of education members, and State Education Department officials, who met for a three-day period at the Rensselaerville Institute, following months of study and reflection on the topic of addressing the impediments to shared decision making. When using the Select Seminar process, the power of the content comes from field based practitioners who are able to build the bridge between useful theory and effective practice. The content of this report combines passionate cries for urgent change as well as cautious warnings about moving too fast. The dialog was sensitive, visionary, inspiring, and yet sometimes conservative. Participants warned of throwing away what is productive in the system for the sake of change, while others proclaimed that we are trying to steal second with our foot on first.

An important element of the result of the Select Seminar is to provide assistance to school sites engaged in change. Particular significance should be given to the Seminar results in this document because of the need for New York State schools to address the recently adopted Excellence and Accountability Plan that will be fully implemented by 1992.

In a recent Select Seminar report on the *Needs of Beginning Principals*, Thomas J. Sergiovanni stated, "Wisdom is always worth celebrating but I want to celebrate who is doing the saying, too." This document planned, implemented, and published by field based practitioners supplies the thoughtful insight, reflection, and practical experience of consciously competent professionals in addressing an exciting concept that is sometimes complex, yet has the potential to finally unleash the enormous talent that is present in school buildings.

We sincerely appreciate the cooperation and hard work of the group of seminar participants involved in this project.

Richard Bamberger
Executive Director, CASDA

Nelson Armlin
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Richard McDonald
Director, LEAD CENTER

The Process

The CASDA select seminars follow a very simple structure based upon a set of guiding principles:

1. ***Participants need to commit adequate time—to work, to reflect, and to write.***
   This seminar was conducted on three consecutive days at the Rensselaerville Institute.

2. ***A conducive working environment is very important.***
   The seminars have been conducted in "protected environments"—away from the work site, in quiet and aesthetically pleasing surroundings. We believe this clearly is a first step in communicating to participants that the seminar is special and there are high expectations that the deliberations of its members will have an important result.

3. ***The seminar participants are the experts.***
   We believe the select seminars have been successful because of the high degree of personal and professional respect afforded participants. While participants do extensive reading for the seminars, visiting experts and lecturers are not usually a part of this experience. The twenty-six individuals who participated in this seminar represented many years of educational experience. They constituted the body of experts.

4. ***Roles are "checked at the door."***
   One's idea must stand on its own, be debated, accepted, or discarded without reference to one's position, prior experience, or education. This seminar included school superintendents, principals, supervisors, teachers, school board members, college staff, and State Education Department personnel.

5. ***Seminars are self-governing entities with organizers serving the group.***
   The coordination of the seminar was managed by LEAD Center-CASDA staff. After providing the initial structure and on-going logistical support, they worked to transfer the governance and direction from themselves to the participants. By the end of the seminar it is fair to say that it was self-governed with the coordinators taking direction from the seminar group.

6. ***The experience is as important as the product.***
   All seminar participants agree that the process, the experience, is most important. Even so, the report provides an important documentation of the experience and serves to validate for each of the participants the energy and effort they expended.

It is also hoped that this report will provide inspiration and help to those who read it and may assist in a modest way to continue what has become a very important national conversation on leadership and schools. We firmly believe such an ongoing conversation can only result in better education for all children.

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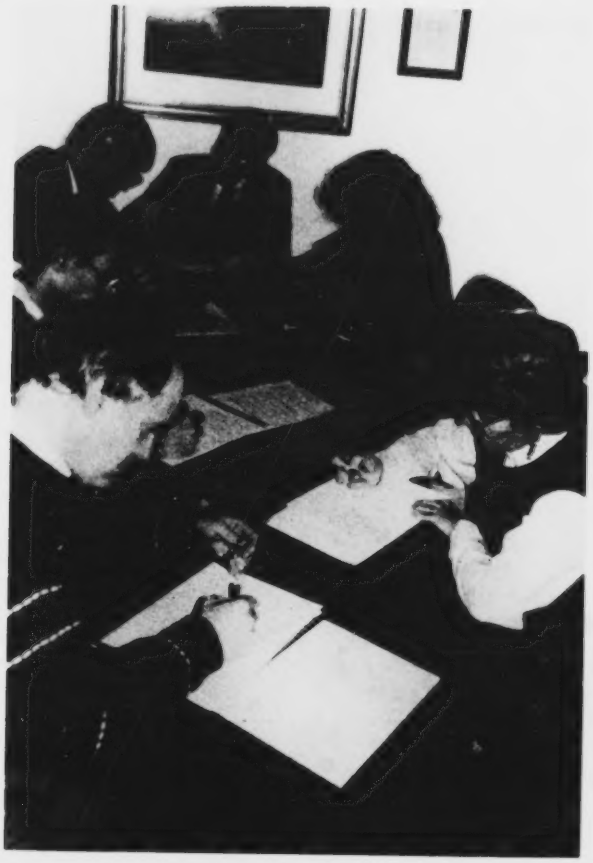

Introduction

For three days in mid-April the Leadership in Educational Administration Development (LEAD) Center brought together a group of twenty-eight educators, representing administrators, teachers, and Board of Education members from across the state and New York State Education Department representatives, at the Rensselaerville Institute. Their task was to identify impediments to shared decision making and consider ways to avoid the pitfalls in making a change from traditional bureaucratic decision making to a more participatory, shared decision making form of leadership.

Even in this divergent group, ". . .there was a surprising consensus about impediments to shared decision making." Issues quickly boiled down to problems with reluctance to change (in both a generic and a specialized sense), lack of trust between individuals and role groups, and lack of education and practice in effective communication and group dynamics. Identifying pitfalls was easy for this energetic group; the real challenge lay in generating helpful recommendations to assist districts stumbling over impediments as they move toward shared decision making.

Awareness of and attitudes toward the shared decision making process varied. Some participants were surprised to discover other colleagues thought it was a new process. Several seminar members expressed weariness with educational jargon that seemed to serve no other purpose than to confuse and repel people. Still others worried about lack of readiness for the process, the time it takes, and the urgent need to make educational changes now! At no time, however, in individual reflective writing, in small group discussions, or in larger sessions, was there dissension about the need for better, more participatory processes for decision making. As one participant noted, "There are a number of ways to tailor shared decision making to a particular setting or set of circumstances. The worth of the shared decision making process is not in question."

The CASDA Select Seminar format modeled the communication and group dynamics considered an essential part of the shared decision making process. The facilitator's role quickly changed from directive to supportive and the Select Seminar group assumed governance of discussions and presentations. Relying upon the expertise of Seminar members and arranging the facilities and time to allow for both reflection and discussion, hallmarks of the Select Seminar approach, resulted in full engagement of participants and clearly demonstrated that, "...people *can* define problems, develop strategies, and make recommendations on issues directly affecting their lives...in a relatively short period of time."

Individual and institutional fear of change have outweighed individual and institutional recognition of the need to restructure to educate more successfully.

A System at Odds with Itself

Let's look at the bad news first...at the risk of sounding like many other education/educator "bashers," many comments at the LEAD Seminar on Addressing the Impediments to Shared Decision Making directly and indirectly condemned the present system as an unresponsive bureaucracy, as a plodding "dinosaur," as a guardian of the status quo - no matter what the cost. As one participant wrote, "...the established culture, omnipresent in American public schools, is fixed, difficult to change, and better known to the public than the culture of any other organization." Individual and institutional fear of change have outweighed individual and institutional recognition of the need to restructure to educate more successfully. Stereotypical role divisions with their closely guarded "powers" and their uncommunicative, fearful stances stood out clearly as major impediments to the shared decision making process.

Teacher's role perceptions, both their own and those of other educators, have been characterized by a dependent stature in a paternalistic setting, by a legacy of distrust of both administrators and fellow teachers, by a non-decisive stance in most situations outside the classroom, and by a "package mentality" within the classroom.

The role of administrators, as perceived by themselves and others in the educational community, has been a "weight-bearing" one. Administrators make decisions, are responsible for implementation, and risk being held accountable. The "weight" felt by administrators discourages them from taking risks, from moving away from the status quo. Protecting perogatives may be more important.

Perceptions of Board of Education members' roles vary, but may include stronger elements of financial management than educational stewardship. Involvement in collective bargaining practices may place the Board in an adversarial position within the school community that is counter-productive to consideration of students' needs.

The negative facets of these unflattering portrayals must be eliminated from the educational system of the 21st century. Educational models in a global environment must rely on divergent groups of people to solve problems by sharing the best of human experiences. As the world grows smaller, the skills needed to function in harmony become more important. Schools, classrooms, families become microcosms of the world: they become laboratories for learning to accept differences, to work together toward a common goal, and to risk and welcome change.

A Laboratory Setting for Change

All question of whether there should be *a change in management style disappeared. The group mobilized behind shared decision making processes as one way to make desired changes.*

The GOOD NEWS is...this LEAD Center Select Seminar on Addressing the Impediments to Shared Decision Making, through reflection, discussion, and the CASDA Select Seminar process itself, became just such a learning laboratory. All question of whether there *should be* a change in management style disappeared. The group mobilized behind shared decision making processes as one way to make desired changes. In reporting Seminar discussions and group and individual reflections, the temptation is to examine each role, discuss the alterations needed to enter the shared decision making process, and unnecessarily perpetuate the undesirable elements of a role division mentality. "Let us see each other as professionals having skills and knowledge needed to benefit children, rather than as members of role groups and bargaining units," pleaded one speaker. In that spirit, we will look at the changes needed or the process itself on an individual basis (personally and regardless of professional role) and on an institutional basis (as a community of learners).

Blocking the Change

Reluctance to change blocks implementation of the shared decision making process. Reasons for this reluctance include:

Fear—"I can't do it differently. I've been doing it this way for years."

Fear—"I'm not needed anymore. Everybody else is making the decisions."

Lack of Support—"Now we will all change to shared decision making - go ahead." No training offered.

Slowness of Progress—"If we all have to sit around and share the decision, it will take so long to get decisions made that nothing will get done, or very little will get done."

Lack of Energy—"Shared decision making means harder work. I don't think I can work harder."

"Let us see each other as professionals havings skills and knowledge needed to benefit children, rather than as members of role groups and bargaining units."

Lack of Commitment—"I only have a couple more years to go before retirement. Don't want to change now."

No models—"I don't know how to change. No one shows me."

Lack of Trust—"What difference does it make; nothing will happen even if we make the effort to change."

Lack of Vision—"I'm getting pretty good results as it is. What difference could this 'new system' mean?"

Lack of Money—"If you expect me to do all this extra work, pay me either in time or money."

Lack of Role Vision—"I'm expected to teach - You're expected to lead. You do your job and I'll do mine. Don't expect me to pick up some of your responsibilities."

Taking Hold
The Need

Growing past the reluctance to change, as illustrated by the previous comments, requires recognition that change is a fact of life. Conditions change constantly. Educators can either take some control and shape changes to fit their professional visions, or be controlled and shaped by outside factors. Evidence of current societal crises and experiences with students obligate us to make drastic changes in the system to address:

- U.S. students lagging behind in science and math
- Drop-out rates approaching 30% in urban districts
- Teacher shortage predictions
- American technology falling behind foreign competition
- Drugs and violence penetrating schools and society
- Professionalism needed in teaching
- School budgets out of phase with student needs
- Teaching students with attention deficits
- Ethics crises in public and private sectors

The Challenge

...change is a fact of life...Educators can either take control...or be controlled...by outside factors.

Change is destabilizing and unpredictable. Individuals and organizations have very real concerns about what a change may mean personally and professionally, what effects it might have, whether it is worth the risk. These factors became intertwined during discussions. Conversations about resistance to change ultimately led to delineation of problems of time, preconceived fears of board members, administrators, and teachers and the necessity for trust-building and collaborative skills development. Comments about school cultures almost automatically included organizational (structural) constraints, lack of trust, unclear definitions for leadership roles within a shared system. In making a change in leadership to a shared decision making style, these problems and barriers overlapped frequently.

Seminar participants urged a proactive position be taken in every school to establish a climate that encourages all stakeholders to take risks, accept responsibility for decisions, reward involvement and innovation (successful or not), and set high standards. They suggested formalizing this commitment in a mission statement and using the design of this statement as an introduction to shared decision making.

Clearing the Path

Developing a clear mission statement and ensuring members of a school's education community contribute and subscribe to the mission of the school help set the stage for a comfortable change climate. Referring often to the "culture" of the school, Seminar discussants included establishment of trust as a critical element in an effective school culture. (Some, in fact, rated lack of trust as the most serious impediment to shared decision making!) "...many people won't talk about mistrust...," noted one Seminar participant in his reflections, "...but, unfortunately, if mistrust is characteristic of a school culture,

people become angry and growth is inhibited." Trust allows learners (defined here as administrators, teachers, students, parents, Board of Education members) to try, take risks, and make changes. It is founded on mutual respect and honesty and heightened by clear, frequent communication, and well-developed collaborative skills.

In Perfect Condition

Trust allows learners (defined here as administrators, teachers, students, parents, Board of Education members) to try, take risks, and make changes.

Even if a school district had in place an optimum climate, shared core values, trust, and people motivated to share power, (and realistically, how many do?), it might still have difficulty involving all elements in making decisions. Seminar discussions repeatedly returned to the need for education and practice in communicating and building skills in collaboration. One participant wrote, "The beginning point is like the chicken and the egg. We want someone to take the lead and at the same time we want the shape of things to derive from the shared decision making process in each school. We want clearly defined ground rules, a reasonable comfort level for change, measured steps to build success upon success, and at the same time we want to keep enough momentum for continuous progress."

A Cautionary Point

The beginning point is like the chicken and the egg. We want someone to take the lead and at the same time we want the shape of things to derive from the shared decision making process in each school.

To further complicate the situation, another Seminar member stressed his feeling that we can't afford to waste too much time on process, mission statements, models. His sense of urgency, his need to directly address serious educational problems led to the following caution. It is all too easy to create a group of "buzz words" and spend valuable time jockeying into position, i.e. perfect position, to define and implement the meanings of those buzz words: so much time, that problems continue to compound. "Forget the jargon," he pressed, "be smart enough to recognize these sweeping educational problems will not be solved without engaging the resources of all staff, and get on with it."

Counter Point

A mandate to "share decisions" without time to understand the process and practice in using techniques can lead to disappointment and early failure.

Select Seminar participants and guests currently involved in joint decision making in their own districts advised groups to be careful for another reason. Building trust, analyzing the school climate, defining tasks and structure, and learning to collaborate take time. A mandate to "share decisions" without time to understand the process and practice in using techniques can lead to disappointment and early failure. An administrative/teacher team, representing a district exploring shared decision making, emphasized the readiness point by saying, "It is important you just don't say to people, 'O.K. do shared decision making...you're a model, go to it.' The groundwork must be carefully laid."

In deliberations and in attempting to "...get on," it became apparent that many strategies exist which minimize the difficulties of the process—both the change process and the implementation of shared decision making as an example of a major change. Examples of educators making the adjustments necessary to implement a shared process were related by representatives from several districts listing some of the pitfalls they've endured and the accomplishments they've celebrated in learning to make joint decisions.

Defining the Issue

LEAD Seminar participants struggled for three days with impediments to shared decision making and with ways to move past those impediments toward implementation of the concept. They recognized shared decision making would and could mean different things to different schools; each school would develop its own definition. They agreed, however, on basing individual definitions upon the following assumptions:

1) Persons who participate in decisions which affect them will have a higher degree of commitment to the successful outcome of those decisions.

2) The higher level of committment will result in better education

3) Teachers who are in the classroom every day often have a clearer understanding of instructional needs than do other educators

4) This better understanding can be applied through some process to result in better education

One group of Seminar discussants framed a simple philosophical statement about the process of shared decision making to summarize their ideas.

> *"We believe shared decision making, as a participatory process, improves performance and morale of both staff and students."*

A Typical Start

For those who have not directly experienced shared decision making, try to imagine how it might work in a school building...

Several people form a group which represents the school as a whole. This group includes teachers, administrators, parents and maybe even students. The group starts out very civilized. Members are prepared to do whatever is needed to become a cohesive group, to manage policy and effect change.

Discussion begins. Many questions are raised. They seem like simple ones: When are we going to meet? How often? Do we need to hire someone to record the proceedings? Who should be the chairperson? What issues are not appropriate for discussion? How long should we serve on this group? Should we elect, appoint, rotate membership?

Impatience, disagreements, intensive discussion take over.

Decisions are made. We plan to meet every Tuesday. Our front office secretary will be recording for us. The principal will chair each meeting. A timekeeper should be chosen to keep the agenda moving. Teacher elections will be held every October and members will serve for two years. Parents will elect their representatives. The principal may appoint others to the group. We will not discuss personnel matters. We will focus on items that we can impact over the next several months. At this point, we all feel wonderfully successful. We congratulate ourselves for meshing our ideas, extending every courtesy, working well as a *team*...We follow our simple ground rules for several weekly meetings. We accomplish some concrete changes such as implementing a process for funding after school clubs and special events. Then, after 4-6 weeks and without much warning, true shared decision-making begins to interrupt the working group.

A controversial issue is raised. One person wants immediate action. Another person asks for more information which will address part of the problem. Other people need to be consulted. A subcommittee is formed. The planned agenda is no longer the priority. Time keeps moving and the issue is not easily resolved. Impatience, disagreements, intensive discussion take over. The team agrees on a basic framework for proceeding. More time passes. Planning Team meetings need to be held more frequently. Many members are bewildered that even very simple agenda items seem to overstay their welcome. Some members begin discussing the burden of the "time commitment." Outside obligations begin to compete for members' attention. Teachers are exposed to the not-so-routine expectations of empowerment and professionalism.

Many members are bewildered that even very simple agenda items seem to overstay their welcome.

Shared decision-making has begun. And anyone who is a beginner will tell you it is very painful. It is painful in the time it consumes, in the patience it requires, in the openness needed from all members. It is painful because actions that once occurred automatically may be delayed or postponed or revised based on the various perspectives shared by members. It is as valuable as it is painful, however, as a creative new resource for school management and student success.

As one might expect, appreciation for shared decision-making as an event comes first. The particulars of arranging for shared decision-making and the acculturation of this idea into a school system shake people up, generate lots of discussion and opinion-making. The introduction of shared decision-making takes continuous reinforcement and perseverance and support on the part of key organizational players in a school district. This is necessary because shared decision-making cuts across every layer of a school district's bureaucracy. It requires understanding, patience and a great deal of risk-taking on the part of teachers and administrators.

...shared decision-making cuts across every layer of a school district's bureaucracy.

More importantly for students, however, is the use of shared decision-making as a long term process to effect meaningful change. In order to reap the long term benefits of shared decision-making, teachers, administrators and board of education members need to have vision and confidence that this approach is worthwhile.

A Case in Point

School Planning Team members for New City Middle School distribute a school climate survey to parents, staff and students. The results indicate that school discipline is a major concern in need of immediate action. A subcommittee on school discipline is formed. The members of the subcommittee convene with very mixed results. Some of their actions are naive ones. They draft a cookbook approach to infractions of school rules. They send letters to the Commissioner of Education asking why parents cannot be mandated to become involved in their children's education. They propose an initial discipline policy that is too simplistic. Individuals with broader experience in school management give input to the subcommittee. Meetings with small groups take place. Policy proposals are revised. Research is presented. Proposals are revised further. Alternatives are explored, discussed and compromised. Discipline is still a major concern for New City Middle School. The difference is that there is a process in place to work on solutions. In addition, there is tremendous benefit to sharing perspectives, even when direct disagreement arises. Parents, teachers and administrators have a much broader understanding of issues that initially generate one-dimensional solutions. Finally, more people are invested in the outcome. School staff and parents realize more ownership, increased responsiveness to problem-solving and personal concern for school management. The sense of detachment that is often cited for society problems is less pervasive in a workplace where people are invested in the process.

...there is tremendous benefit to sharing perspectives, even when direct disagreement arises.

Some Common Denominators

...with shared decision making processes, we accept that together we will take responsibility for management of change, and take joint ownership of group decisions.

There are many things we should all know as common denominators. We should all know about the nature of adult learning and the nature of the change process. If we can see ourselves as learners, we are ready for participation in cooperative learning; we are positioned in a collegial relationship from the start; and, we are more likely to emphasize our commonalitites than our differences. When we think of learning as a skill and commit ourselves to a lifetime of learning, we exhibit that openness and willingness to risk which we say is essential for shared decision making. When we agree to come together with others in our building or district to learn shared decision making processes, we accept that together we will take responsibility for management of change, and take joint ownership of group decisions. As active learners we will know and use analysis, diagnosis, feedback, planning, reflection and many other related activities. Seeing individuals as part of a group of learners leads us to involve others and relate to various constituencies in an engaged way, avoiding polarities, and emphasizing what we have in common.

And Again a Caution

It is not accomplished quickly. It is nurtured over time with flurries of excitement and activity, periods of disappointment and backwards movement. Anyone in the throes of implementation must consider that the benefits over time outweigh the immediate complexities.

MAKING SHARED DECISION MAKING WORK: Attacking a division of power

As members of the Seminar tackled a long list of specific impediments to shared decision making, the issues of sharing "power" and role definition emerged frequently in group discussions and in reflective writing. One group illustrated the "Accountability...who's to blame" problem and urged removal of such a structure.

Fear	Blame
Society	Society
Board of Education	Board of Education
Superintendent	Superintendent
Principal	Principal
Assistant Principal	Assistant Principal
Teachers	Teachers
Students	Students

Teachers seem to feel, for the most part, they have little/no input into the major decisions made in the operation of the school, while administrators seem to feel that although teachers would like a say in the decision making process, they are unwilling to accept 'responsibility' for taking part in this process.

As noted by one participant, "The impediment to shared decision making that I believe is the most serious is the problem of the division line between administrators and teachers and the resulting lack of communication between these two groups. There seems to be a negative feeling with regard to 'responsibility' and 'accountability' and who is going to 'take the blame.'

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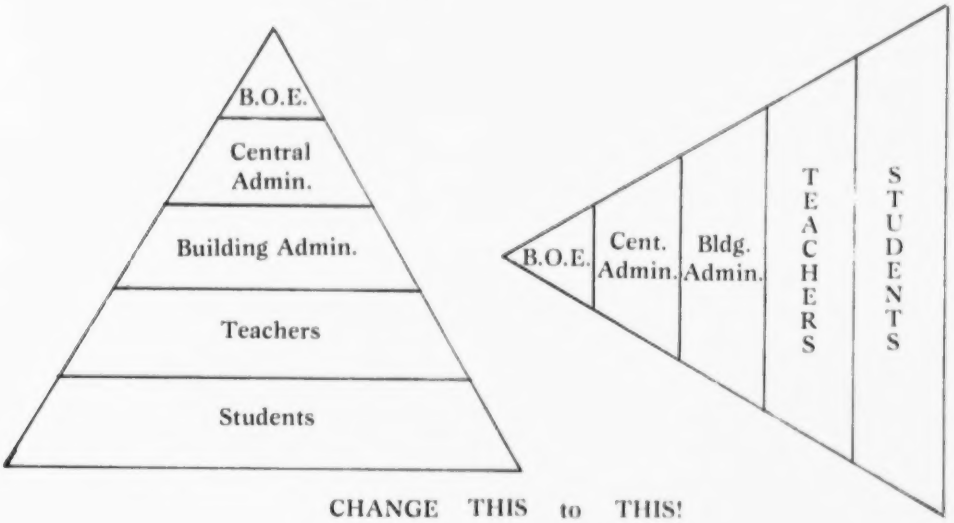
"Shared decision making should result, I believe, in one goal being reached, the idea of overall school improvement. It should be looked on as a 'positive' situation with both groups working toward this goal. The end result will benefit both groups as well as the people most at risk—the student population. This shared dialogue would most likely relieve feelings of mistrust."

Another group, in its final presentation, addressed the same issue visually by drawing the typical triangle to describe the hierarchic structure of the system and flipping it on its side to indicate all "power" moving in a concentrated level, driven by student need, toward one goal.



CHANGE THIS to THIS!

Making it Work

Encouraging Change

To provide the "power" to move effectively, as a unit, toward meeting student needs, LEAD Select Seminar members recommend schools address both the general change process *and* the specific process of shared decision making. Creating an environment conducive to and supportive of change respects and encourages open communication between all parties, regardless of their roles. Boards of Education members, administrators and teachers are encouraged to:

- Identify and/or demonstrate data showing a need for change
- Increase awareness of need to change through research, inservice, other resources
- Use staff surveys to determine readiness of individuals
- Recognize individual differences in communication and collaboration skills
- Provide education and practice in team-building skills
- Offer incentives and recognition for innovative work
- Include support at various levels...people, time, money
- Focus first on those most ready, encourage others gradually

Creating an environment conducive to and supportive of change respects and encourages open communication between all parties, regardless of their roles.

Sharing a Vision

Very often, in the educational process, there is no shared vision of expectations as they relate to outcomes. Professionals may have different ideas of their purposes and roles. To avoid this impediment, members of the Select Seminar urge schools to:

- Create a shared vision or a mission statement for school
  —Involve all segments of the educational community in creating the mission statement
  —Define terms clearly for all
- Identify core values subscribed to by all staff
  —Communicate values
  —Encourage modeling of values
  —Provide incentives for staff and students for upholding values
- Develop trust and respect among all professionals.

Increasing Trust

Trust is the essential factor making it possible to act in a collaborative fashion. If you do not trust the people you work with, it is difficult to plan, organize, and follow through on ideas to benefit students and schools. For an issue labeled as one "...nobody wants to talk about...," lack of trust as an impediment to change and shared decision making received a great deal of attention, particularly in the written reflections of seminar participants. Building trust may be encouraged by:

If you do not trust the people you work with, it is difficult to plan, organize, and follow through on ideas to benefit students and schools.

- Providing opportunities for frequent, open communication
  —Allowing for ongoing dialogue between groups and individuals
  —Providing a non-threatening vehicle for airing individual perceptions
  —Creating training opportunities for communication skills
  —Fostering group dynamics
- Demonstrating faith in the skill and good intent of others
- Modeling behaviors to encourage trust
  —Faithfully following-up on agreements
  —Publicly recognizing group and individual innovations and accomplishments
  —Supporting risk-taking
  —Providing honest and realistic expectations and evaluations
- Recognizing sufficient time and patience are required to establish a sense of trust.

Developing Skills

Specific knowledge and skills are required to work as a team and approach education in a collegial manner.

Specific knowledge and skills are required to work as a team and approach education in a collegial manner. These skills have not, traditionally, been a part of the education and training of all staff. LEAD Select Seminar members recommend remedying lack of skills by those involved in the change process and in shared decision making models by:

- Providing background information and knowledge of practices in other schools
- Encouraging visitation and workshop attendance
- Supporting collaborative activities between all levels of staff
- Creating a non-evaluative, non-threatening environment for collaboration
- Providing education for all educational community members in...
  - ...Team building
  - ...How groups work, including roles members play
  - ...Problem solving techniques, including decision making strategies
  - ...Group processing and evaluation
  - ...Planning, conducting, evaluating and providing feedback on meetings
  - ...Effective communication, individual and group
  - ...Conflict resolution-interpersonal, inter and intra-group
  - ...The school as a social organization

The Seminar members further advise that communication, leadership, and consensus building be a part of the pre-service training and graduate programs of all teachers, administrators and Board of Education members.

Sharing Decisions

Participants in the LEAD Select Seminar on Addressing the Impediments to Shared Decision Making represented the New York State Education Department, and administrators, Board of Education members and teachers from school districts around the state. Their discussions of the impediments to and implementation of the shared decision making process reflect their ideas of "best practice" based on perceptions from their specific roles. With the previous needs addressed and with a mission clearly in mind, the Seminar participants advise the following be considered in a process of shared decision making:

- Boards of Education need to formulate a policy statement supporting the concept of shared decision making
  —showing formal commitment to the concept
  —demonstrating their understanding of the concept by creating very general operating guidelines
  —providing for continuation of the process even though membership on the Board may change
- Collective bargaining agents must "cut some slack" for the exploratory phase of shared decision making, i.e., allow some room for flexible approaches
- Ground rules for shared decision making within a school need to be carefully laid, and a context for those ground rules established within the district
- Jargon and specific terms, unfamiliar to many, should be defined and a common understanding reached by participants
- Agreed upon, step by step procedures need to be developed for making decisions
- Types of questions and problems suitable for consideration in the shared decision making process should be reviewed and each problem or question submitted to the group process only if appropriate
- A vehicle needs to be developed to ensure that feedback and information reach all those involved

Seminar participants urge steps be taken to empower all educators to participate in making decisions by:

- Avoiding stereotypical role divisions
- Flattening the organizational structure
- Implementing peer evaluation and mentoring
- Increasing the professionalism of teachers

Conclusion

Three intensive days of dialogue, reflection, and writing ended with a presentation to over 75 invited guests. After participants celebrated their accomplishments and lunched with guests, they met for one final opportunity to make a statement. The trust built over the three days was evident. There was no doubt in anyone's mind concerning the effectiveness of this shared professional experience, as the following comments illustrate:

"Discovering areas of commonality is very affirming..."

"...as an individual, I grew!"

"Participating in this Select Seminar on Addressing the Impediments to Shared Decision Making reinforced my belief that good things come from group action."

"I was pleased to see my concerns reflected at all levels."

"The topic and the Select Seminar process to explore the topic were in 'sync.'"

"This was a great opportunity to hear and share perspectives!"

"I learned more in three days than in three weeks of a college course. The process makes the difference."

"Everybody brings something important...they generously put themselves on the line to tell what they personally could do."

"I was pleased that the conference was away from any distractions which allowed me to put forth total effort. I learned that we are not alone in our journey toward the shared decision making process."

Afterword

A report such as *A View From the Inside: Addressing the Impediments to Shared Decision Making*, must, by its nature, be general. The desire at first is to expect such a report to be a compendium of "how tos" in approaching this subject. But on reflection, the conclusion is evident that each district, perhaps each school building, must find its own way to shared decision making. For shared decision making is a process, not a conclusion.

We thank Dorothy Jacobsen and Ethel Hammett from the Troy City Schools for spending Monday evening, April 10, with the Seminar participants. Dorothy and Ethel shared their experiences as they explored the concept of shared decision making and work with colleagues in Troy.

We also thank Marie Cianca and Alison Hyde for their work as writers and Dee Warner for assuming the responsibility of overall editor.

LEAD Center's Select Seminar Participants Decision Making

—by Dee Warner, Director, Albany Professional Development Center

For several days this spring at the Rensselaerville Institute, a group of educators from around New York State met to discuss "Impediments to Shared Decision-Making." Following the CASDA Select Seminar process, teachers, principals, central administration personnel, board of education members, and State Education Department representatives talked together in various role and mixed role groups about what educators must do to involve all elements of the community in making decisions. The seminar was sponsored by the LEAD Center and funded by a special grant from the State Education Department.

My role in the seminar was to serve as "process observer." As such, I was to sit in on as many of the group conversations as possible and gain an overall picture of the dynamics of group interaction, the spirit of the discussions, and a sense of the "whole." What follows are some of my observations and reflections.

A recurrent theme throughout all discussions dealt with the issue of developing a sense of trust between and among educators. This is a favorite theme of mine, but listening to educators with various roles, talk about "turfdom" and concerns about who's responsible or accountable for what forced me to recognize the sweeping defensiveness of teachers and administrators. Participants decided we are well past the point of offering a few "warm fuzzies" to remedy the situation; they urged concrete planning of opportunities and experiences geared to increasing communication and rethinking role perceptions.

One place to begin altering attitudes, as suggested often during the seminar, is eliminating division lines among educators. The "we vs. they" mentality has got to go! At first I saw people merely wince when such terms as "top-down," "bottom-up," "in the trenches," "the ranks," etc., were repeatedly used, but soon objections were voiced. Old habits are hard to break, but participants decided, just as attention is paid to removing gender and ethnic negativisms, so too should those terms which devalue professionals be discarded. One discussion group drew the traditional triangle to illustrate their view of the organization, flipped it over just for fun, and finally decided to place it on its side to indicate all stratas heading in the same direction...towards a common goal.

Working toward a unified goal became the focus for two separate, but related discussion topics. First, the overriding concern of participants was that schools develop a mission statement and build the culture of that school around that statement. They emphasized the participatory nature of developing the mission statement and the importance of support from all stakeholders in the school. Shared decision-making is a vehicle to help keep the mission of the school and help reach its goals. Regardless of the group or topic of discussion, everyone frequently returned to the beliefs that all children can learn and lifelong learning is important.

The concept of lifelong learning directly relates to the second concern with a common focus—sharing decisions. The idea of shared decision-making raised a host of complex questions. What constitutes a shared decision? Who shares in the making of decisions? Which decisions lend themselves to a shared process? Who is responsible? Who can be held accountable? How is it done? Where are there working models to observe? Is there a guarantee sharing decisions will improve an organization? What skills or training are needed? Educators have much to learn if we are to answer these questions and incorporate shared decision-making into the structure of our schools.

Communicating and sharing the power to make decisions is crucial to reforming schools. Reforming schools to make them better places for learning necessitates making changes and change is difficult for many. A major impediment to shared decision-making identified by the seminar is the reluctance on the part of teachers, administrators and boards of education to view change as an opportunity. Issues of power, empowerment, fear, apathy, and risk-taking received a great deal of attention.

Much group discussion centered on fear and mistrust among professionals in today's schools: fear of each other and of change and mistrust of each other and of change. The personal and professional changes needed to encourage communication and establish trust (not to mention share in making decisions)

Consider Ways to Implement Shared

threaten many educators. As one participant put it "...included in the word **change** is a little word, **'hang'**!"

From an administrative viewpoint, reluctance to share power in the form of group decision-making was justified by the fact that the administrator is held accountable if things go poorly and by fear the role will be diminished if someone else makes decisions. Fearing that poor decisions would be made by groups, one administrator worried that he would be left "hanging." A colleague pointed out the increased chances of making better decisions with contributions from several minds which did little to relieve his skeptical feelings, but he did begin to rethink his position.

Teachers' concerns focused on betrayed trust and past instances of lack of administrative follow through on teacher supported decisions. They voiced concerns that they would be held accountable for decisions made by others and not be allowed to control the implementation factors of a decision. All participants expressed a need to gain a better perspective of individual roles, of individual schools as they fit into the district, and the district as it reflects the larger community. They applauded recent moves to implement mentor, peer support, and coaching programs to decrease isolation for teachers and principals and to establish teams and committees made up of various role groups to increase opportunities for professional dialogue.

The idea of shared decision-making heightened confusion about issues of responsibility and accountability: Can you have one without the other? Examination of decisions and their ramifications in the educational setting reveals a state of total disarray and pinpoints one reason systems are failing to adequately educate. Seminar questions about change and the shared decision-making process gradually shifted from how will this change affect me to the broader question of will this change improve the schooling situation? As discussions progressed, more positive view of change as opportunity, as growth, and as an important and necessary part of the learning process emerged.

After a day and a half wrestling with rather thorny and somewhat abstract issues, seminar members were revitalized by a conversation with Ethel Hammett and Dorothy Jacobson from the Troy City School District. Dorothy and Ethel shared their experiences as they explored the concept of shared decision-making and work with colleagues in Troy to find concrete answers to many of the questions posed earlier. They echoed the sentiments of one superintendent who advised resisting the usual tendency of educators to analyze, review, consider, etc., until a perfect plan is set; instead, they urged an immediate and mutual look at shared decision-making as one way to improve education. Participants viewed, through their eyes, the many facets of the change process, and found their realistic account a thought-provoking, powerful example of learning and development.

Encouraging participation, acknowledging initiative, and rewarding creative problem-solving are essential to a climate conducive to change and shared decision-making. Seminar participants (particularly school board members) stressed the need to extend incentives and express appreciation for involvement and innovative ideas, not just for success. They strongly recommended improvement be set as a goal, not perfection.

Throughout the conference one sensed an urgency: a need for increasing communication, developing trust, and creating a climate for change. School board members, representing a wider community, in concert with teachers, administrators and State Education representatives recommended districts tap the "zest factor"; use the latent capacity in the organization and stimulate surges of energy usually present in a crisis situation (Schaffer, 1989). The group concluded the conference with an aura of "let's-go-for-results-at-once"; with a desire to set a clear goal, put success within reasonable grasp, work collaboratively, and learn from and enjoy the process. ■